

August 13, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

The International Council of Women's Business Leadership (ICWBL) applauds the Administration's efforts to promote women's economic empowerment worldwide. In order to effectively move the bar on women's business leadership, we recommend that these efforts include a coherent strategy on improving channels and mechanisms that support women's ascent to leadership positions.

Whether on corporate boards, in senior-level management positions, or other important economic decision-making roles, women represent a much smaller percentage of leadership positions than their economic contribution, education levels, and business successes would indicate.

To address key barriers to women's leadership, the ICWBL and its Subcommittee on Leadership recommend the U.S. Department of State support and encourage the following policy recommendations and projects.

Policy Recommendations

1. Family support infrastructure policies should be introduced

Studies have identified work-life balance challenges to be one of the four major barriers preventing women from rising to leadership positions. To this end, it is important that child- and elder care support is demanded by governments and provided by both public and private alternatives, accessible and affordable to all. Parents should also be granted the ability and right to share parental leave.

2. Development aid and loans should be conditioned on implementing policies that promote gender equality

To address the women's leadership gap, it is recommended that the U.S. State Department, in collaboration with the ICWBL and its subcommittees, urge the IMF, UN, OECD, EU, World Bank and other development finance institutions and international authorities to condition and monitor loans, development assistance, aid and support, to ensure that gender equality measures are included. Millennium Challenge Corporation targets and requirements, those that ensure gender equality measures be taken to create equal and sustainable growth, should be broadly introduced.

3. Gender equality audits should be required and transparent

Public, private and non-profit sectors should work together to ensure that women and men are treated equally and have equal opportunities. Building on Policy Recommendation 2, it is recommended that government-funded efforts should, therefore, be audited, and these outcomes should be presented and published according to gender specific targets, for transparency. To address the gaps in private sector gender equity, it is recommended that publicly traded companies be required to “report or explain” the percentage of women on their boards and executive committees. These practices are already mandated in many countries, and the U.S. State Department is encouraged to look to these examples for best practices.

Subcommittee Projects

1. Policy Series

To inform these policy recommendations, ICWBL Subcommittee on Leadership members will host a series of public-private dialogues in all global regions, focused on the following questions: how can the public sector create incentives, and how can the private sector offer solutions, to enhance work-life balance options for women in their countries and institutions? Solutions will be shared with all ICWBL members and institutions.


2. Women Up

The Women Up platform will engage ICWBL members to participate – both individually and through their institutions – in activities that promote women’s business leadership. Women Up will have two components: a) ICWBL members are invited to join the Women Up leaders circle, which includes personal commitments to: mentor 1-3 emerging women leaders; and to share with each other best practices on improving women’s leadership pipelines within their own institutions; b) global roll-out of the Centered Leadership program, co-sponsored by McKinsey and based on its successful women’s leadership training program.

As a global leader on women’s political and economic leadership, we believe it is very useful for the Administration to clearly support and encourage such gender equity policies and projects.

Safeguards that ensure equal participation in work, public sector and family life not only encourage women’s participation and access to leadership positions, but contribute to sustainable economic development, a prerequisite for growth on macro-economic and societal levels.

Sincerely,



Cherie Blair
Vice Chair ICWBL



Indra Nooyi
Vice Chair ICWBL



Maud Olofsson
Sub-Committee Chair ICWBL